

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 PARIS 07478

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, FR

SUBJECT: FRENCH INTERNAL SCENE: A PRE-ELECTION CLIMATE

1. SUMMARY. AS A RESULT OF INCESSANT RUMORS AND RECENT PRESS SPECULATION THAT POMPIDOU IS SERIOUSLY ILL AND CANNOT LONG CONTINUE IN OFFICE, FRANCE IS ENTERING A PRE-ELECTION CLIMATE, WITH PROSPECT THAT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS MAY BE HELD SOON. POMPIDOU HAS NOT PUBLICLY INDICATED HIS CHOICE FOR A PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSOR AND IT IS NOT CLEAR AS OF NOW WHO WOULD BE THE GAULLIST (UDR) CANDIDATE.

SOCIALIST LEADER FRANCOIS MITTERRAND WILL BE THE SOCIALIST PARTY CANDIDATE AND MAY BE THE CANDIDATE OF THE UNITED LEFT. ALTHOUGH TOO SOON TO PREDICT, EARLY PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS COULD RESULT IN VICTORY BY A NON-GAULLIST CANDIDATE AND A POSSIBLE CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS. END SUMMARY.

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2. CALM ON THE SURFACE, THE CURRENT FRENCH INTERNAL SCENE IS MARKED BY AN UNDERLYING CURRENT OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY DIRECTLY AIMED AT THE NEXT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. FEEDING THIS CURRENT ARE INCESSANT RUMORS THAT PRESIDENT POMPIDOU IS SERIOUSLY ILL AND CANNOT LONG CONTINUE IN OFFICE. IT SEEMS INCREASINGLY LIKELY THAT POMPIDOU WILL BE FORCED TO RESIGN BEFORE THE SPRING OF 1976 WHEN HIS TERM EXPIRES. AND PROBABLY EVEN BEFORE THE END OF 1974. THUS FRANCE IS ENTERING A PRE-ELECTION CLIMATE BUT WITHOUT THE CERTAINTY OF KNOWING WHEN THE NEXT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS WILL TAKE PLACE. THE POSSIBILITY OF POMPIDOU'S SUDDEN DEPARTURE POSES THE PROBLEM OF WHETHER A GAULLIST (UDR) CANDIDATE IS AVAILABLE WHO CAN WIN THE NEXT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AND HOLD TOGETHER THE COALITION NOW IN

POWER. POMPIDOU HAS NOT YET PUBLICLY INDICATED HIS CHOICE FOR A PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSOR.

3. THE LEADING CONTENDERS. IT IS FAR FROM CLEAR WHO WILL REPRESENT THE GOVERNMENT COALITION IN THE NEXT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. IN ADDITION TO FORMER PRIME MINISTER JACQUES CHABAN-DELMAS (WHOM POMPIDOU REPORT-EDLY DISLIKES) AND FINANCE MINISTER VALERY GISCARD D'ESTAING (WHO IS ANATHEMA TO ORTHODOX GAULLISTS LIKE MICHEL DEBRE), PRIME MINISTER PIERRE MESSMER MUST BE REGARDED AS A POSSIBLE CONTENDER. LESS LIKELY BUT POSSIBLE AS A COMPROMISE CANDIDATE IS ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT EDGAR FAURE. NOR IS IT CERTAIN THAT SOCIALIST LEADER FRANCOIS MITTERRAND WILL BE THE ONLY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE OF THE LEFT. THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY COULD DECIDE TO FIELD ITS SECRETARY-GENERAL, GEORGES MARCHAIS OR SOME OTHER PCF "NOTABLE", AS A FIRST-ROUND CANDIDATE. THERE PROBABLY WOULD ALSO BE ONE CENTRIST CANDIDATE IN THE FIRST ROUND, PROBABLY JEAN LECANUET OR JEAN-JACQUES SERVAN-SCHREIBER. FURTHERMORE SENATE PRESIDENT ALAIN POHER MIGHT DECIDE TO RUN AGAIN. THESE CONTENDERS WILL CONTINUE TO TRY TO BUILD THEIR SUPPORT -- IN SOME CASES BY SEEKING THE LIMELIGHT, IN OTHERS BY MANEUVERING BEHIND THE SCENES. SINCE NO SINGLE PARTY

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IN FRANCE IS CAPABLE OF ELECTING A PRESIDENT, EACH CANDIDATE MUST SEEK WIDER SUPPORT. MITTERRAND WILL THUS SEEK SUPPORT FROM THE COMMUNISTS AND THE CENTER-LEFT; GISCARD WILL SEEK SUPPORT FROM THE GAULLISTS AND THE LECANUET CENTRISTS; AND CHABAN-DELMAS OR MESSMER FROM GISCARD'S INDEPENDENT REPUBLICANS AND FROM THE CENTER.

4. GISCARD D'ESTAING. STILL POPULAR, WITH CLEAR
PRESIDENTIAL AMBITIONS, GISCARD IS BITTERLY RESENTED BY
MANY GAULLISTS WHO FEAR HE COULD STILL GAIN THE INSIDE
TRACK IN THE PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION RACE. DURING THE
MARCH 16-17 GAULLIST DEPUTIES' MEETING AT NOGENT-SUR-
MARNE, HE WAS VIOLENTLY ATTACKED BY SOME OLD-LINE
GAULLISTS, ESPECIALLY MICHEL DEBRE, FOR HIS FAILURE TO
COMBAT INFLATION. AS FINANCE MINISTER (MANY BELIEVE

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HE HAS STAYED TOO LONG IN THIS POSITION), HE IS BOUND
TO BE BLAMED FOR THE SPIRALLING INFLATION AND THE
DETERIORATING ECONOMIC SITUATION IN FRANCE. HE MAY HAVE
MISSED HIS CHANCE TO PUT SOME DISTANCE BETWEEN HIMSELF
AND THE GOVERNMENT BY NOT DECLINING TO REJOIN THE THIRD

MESSMER CABINET, ALTHOUGH HE STILL COULD RESIGN JUST BEFORE THE START OF THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN. HIS MAIN PROBLEM IS HOW TO OVERCOME WIDESPREAD DOUBTS BY THE GAULLIST PARTY FAITHFUL: AS A "CONSERVATIVE" AND NON-GAULLIST, HE WILL ADHERE TO THE GAULLIST LEGACY WHILE GAINING ENOUGH GAULLIST, CENTER AND CENTER-LEFT SUPPORT TO BEAT MITTERRAND.

5. ACCORDING TO MICHEL D'ORNANO, SECRETARY GENERAL OF GISCARD'S INDEPENDENT REPUBLICAN (IR) PARTY, GISCARD'S CONFIDENTIAL

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STRATEGY COULD ONLY BE BASED ON A SCENARIO IN WHICH THE MAJORITY PARTIES RUN MORE THAN ONE CANDIDATE ON THE FIRST ROUND. GISCARD WOULD RUN AGAINST CHABAN- DELMAS. THE GAULLIST PARTY (UDR) WOULD SPLIT, WITH THE HARD-LINE GAULLISTS SUPPORTING CHABAN AND THE REST OF THE PARTY -- PLUS THE CENTER OPPOSITION -- RALLYING BEHIND GISCARD. GISCARD'S PARTY WOULD THEN ATTEMPT TO ORGANIZE ANEW PRESIDENTIAL MAJORITY WITH THE CENTER AND WITH THE MORE LIBERAL ELEMENTS OF THE UDR.

6. JACQUES CHABAN-DELMAS. FIRED AS PRIME MINISTER BY POMPIDOU IN JULY 1972 AND REPLACED BY MESSMER, CHABAN-DELMAS REMAINS A POPULAR PUBLIC FIGURE DESPITE SOME POSSIBLE VULNERABILITY BECAUSE OF EARLIER INCOME TAX SCANDALS. HE REMAINS A NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEPUTY AND MAYOR OF BORDEAUX. LAST NOVEMBER THE UDR NATIONAL CONGRESS IN NANTES ACCLAIMED CHABAN-DELMAS AS THE DE FACTO STANDARD-BEARER OF THE GAULLIST MOVEMENT. HE EMERGED AS THE DELEGATES' CLEAR CHOICE FOR PRESIDENT. LEADING GAULLIST "BARONS" SUCH AS MICHEL DEBRE SEEM TO HAVE RALLIED BEHIND CHABAN-DELMAS AS THE GAULLIST WITH THE BEST CHANCE OF WINNING THE PRESIDENCY. HE WILL CERTAINLY MAKE A SERIOUS BID IF POMPIDOU IS FORCED TO STEP DOWN. IN THE ABSENCE OF A STRONG DIRECTIVE FROM POMPIDOU REGARDING HIS SUCCESSOR, CHABAN-DELMAS IS LIKELY TO EMERGE AS THE UDR CANDIDATE.

7. PERHAPS THE LEAST OBVIOUSLY "GAULLIST" OF THE CURRENT GAULLIST LEADERS (ALTHOUGH WITH IMPECCABLE PARTY CREDENTIALS), CHABAN-DELMAS COULD TURN OUT TO APPEAL TO THE WIDEST RANGE OF VOTERS -- INCLUDING THE YOUTH. AT THE UDR DEPUTIES' MEETING AT NOGENT, CHABAN-DELMAS, ACCORDING TO ONE PRESS ACCOUNT, WAS "MUTE AS A CARP AND DISCREET AS A VIOLET." WE EXPECT HIS INITIAL POSTURE WILL BE TO CONTINUE TO KEEP A LOW PROFILE, AVOID PUBLIC DECLARATIONS ON GOF POLICY MATTERS, ATTEMPT TO MEND HIS FENCES WITH POMPIDOU AND BIDE HIS TIME.

8. PIERRE MESSMER. UNTIL RECENTLY IT WAS NOT THOUGHT
THAT THE DOUR PRIME MINISTER HAD ANY PRESIDENTIAL ASPI-
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RATIONS. TECHNICALLY COMPETENT BUT POLITICALLY COLOR-
LESS, HE HAS HAD TROUBLE FAR IN DEVELOPING A
STYLE WITH VOTER APPEAL. A RECENT SAMPLING OF OPINION
AMONG SENIOR FRENCH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS REVEALED
CONCERN THAT MESSMER'S LACK OF POPULARITY -- TOGETHER
WITH POMPIDOU'S VACILLATING LEADERSHIP --

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COULD LEAD TO A MITTERRAND VICTORY IN THE NEXT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IF HE WERE MATCHED AGAINST MESSMER. AND YET MESSMER'S COMBINATION OF PERSONAL INTEGRITY AND HARD-LINE, ORTHODOX GAULLISM COULD HAVE SOME APPEAL TO THE BASICALLY CONSERVATIVE FRENCH ELECTORATE, ESPECIALLY IN THE PROVINCES, AND PARTICULARLY IF THE ALTERNATIVE APPEARED TO BE A STRONGLY COMMUNIST-INFLUENCED UNITED LEFT. HIS PROBLEM REMAINS HOW TO PROJECT AN IMAGE OF DYNAMIC LEADERSHIP IN VIEW OF HIS LACK OF CHARISMA.

9. SINCE POMPIDOU'S REAPPOINTMENT OF MESSMER AS PRIME MINISTER, WE HAVE HEARD REPORTS THAT THE PRESIDENT HAS ALREADY SETTLED ON MESSMER AS HIS SUCCESSOR. WHILE THIS IS POSSIBLE, IT SEEMS MORE LIKELY THAT POMPIDOU WILL KEEP HIS OPTIONS OPEN AND POSTPONE THE CHOICE OF A SUCCESSOR FOR AS LONG AS POSSIBLE. AS A PRAGMATIC POLITICAL

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TICIAN, POMPIDOU WILL CERTAINLY DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO PREVENT MITTERRAND -- WHOM HE DISLIKES AND DIS-TRUSTS -- FROM SUCCEEDING HIM. IF THERE IS STRONG EVIDENCE THAT PROMOTING MESSMER AS HIS SUCCESSOR WOULD RESULT IN MITTERRAND'S GAINING THE ELYSEE, POMPIDOU MAY YET SEEK ANOTHER SOLUTION.

10. LECANUET, SERVAN-SCHREIBER AND THE CENTER OPPOSITION. THE AIM OF THE CENTER REFORM MOVEMENT WAS TO PUT TOGETHER SOME SORT OF COALITION WHICH WOULD APPEAL TO THE ELECTORATE AS THE NUCLEUS FOR AN ALTERNATIVE TO GAULLISM THAT WOULD APPEAL TO THOSE WHO WANT CHANGE WITHOUT THE COMMUNISTS IN THE CABINET. BUT IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT THE CENTER CAN OVERCOME THE CURRENT POLARIZATION OF THE POLITICAL SCENE BETWEEN THE GAULLIST MAJORITY AND THE UNITED LEFT OPPOSITION.

11. THE MEETING OF THE CENTER REFORMISTS AT VERSAILLES MARCH 16-17 ONLY SERVED TO HIGHLIGHT INCREASING SIGNS OF STRAIN. LECANUET AND SERVAN-SCHREIBER CAME TOGETHER BRIEFLY AND UNEASILY AT VERSAILLES, BUT THEIR PERSONALITIES AND THEIR POLITICAL INSTINCTS CONTINUE TO DIVIDE THEM. BY AGREEING THAT THE MOVEMENT SHOULD FIELD A CANDIDATE IN THE NEXT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS BUT BY FAILING TO AGREE ON A CANDIDATE, THE CONGRESS HEIGHTENED SPECULATION THAT LECANUET'S CENTER DEMOCRATIC PARTY AND

SERVAN-SCHREIBER'S RADICAL PARTY COULD SPLIT IN THE FUTURE. MEANWHILE, THE REFORM MOVEMENT REMAINS WEAK AND DIVIDED. IT CANNOT BE IGNORED, HOWEVER, SINCE THE VOTES OF THE VARIOUS CENTER PARTY SUPPORTERS COULD

BE CRUCIAL TO THE OUTCOME OF A CLOSE PRESIDENTIAL
CONTEST.

12. MITTERRAND AND THE LEFT. IF POMPIDOU WERE FORCED
TO RESIGN SOON, AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF RISING INFLATION
AND UNEMPLOYMENT -- AND IF THE INCREASED SOCIAL AGITA-
TION IN VARIOUS SECTORS OF THE ECONOMY IN RECENT WEEKS
CONTINUES, MITTERRAND'S CHANCES FOR AN ELECTION VICTORY
COULD BE INCREASED. MITTERRAND TOOK A CALCULATED RISK
IN SIGNING THE JUNE 1972 AGREEMENT ON A COMMON PROGRAM
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WITH THE COMMUNISTS. DESPITE SOME PREDICTIONS TO THE
CONTRARY, THE UNITED LEFT HAS STUCK TOGETHER AND IS
SHOWING NEW DYNAMISM. MITTERRAND IS NOT HIMSELF A
REVOLUTIONARY FIGURE BUT WILL BASE HIS CAMPAIGN ON A
STRATEGY DESIGNED TO DEMONSTRATE THAT HE IS NOT A
"PRISONER" OF THE COMMUNISTS BUT IS HIS OWN MAN. HIS

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STRATEGY CALLS FOR DEFENDING THE MEASURES OUTLINED IN THE COMMON PROGRAM, COOPERATING WITH THE COMMUNISTS IN ATTACKING THE GOVERNMENT, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME TRYING TO DIFFERENTIATE HIMSELF FROM THE COMMUNISTS ON QUESTIONS OF INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY, DEMOCRATIC PROCEDURES, AND SOME FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES. THE BASIC QUESTION CONCERNING THE EXTENT TO WHICH MITTERRAND WOULD BE ABLE TO DOMINATE AND CONTROL COMMUNIST INFLUENCE IN A POPULAR FRONT GOVERNMENT DOUBTLESS WILL BE RAISED REPEATEDLY DURING THE CAMPAIGN BY HIS PRESIDENTIAL OPPONENTS.

13. THERE HAS BEEN SOME SPECULATION ON THE POSSIBILITY OF A DEAL BETWEEN MITTERRAND AND CHABAN-DELMAS OR GISCARD D'ESTAING. IF MITTERRAND WERE TO WIN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS HE WOULD BE FACED WITH A NON-LEFTIST MAJORITY IN THE ASSEMBLY AND WOULD HAVE TWO CHOICES.
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HE COULD DISSOLVE THE ASSEMBLY -- WHICH THE COMMUNISTS WOULD URGE -- AND CALL FOR NEW ELECTIONS, HOPING FOR A LEFTIST MAJORITY. OR HE COULD NAME A PRIME MINISTER SUCH AS CHABAN-DELMAS AND A CABINET WHICH THE PRESENT ASSEMBLY COULD SUPPORT. THIS WOULD OBVIOUSLY BREAK UP THE SOCIALIST-COMMUNIST ALLIANCE AND THE PRESENT MAJORITY COALITION.

14. POMPIDOU'S POSITION. IN AN UNCERTAIN ATMOSPHERE -- AND FOLLOWING RECENT US POLICY INITIATIVES IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE WASHINGTON ENERGY CONFERENCE -- IT IS UNLIKELY THAT POMPIDOU WILL MAINTAIN A TRADITIONAL GAULLIST STANCE. HE MUST BE DISMAYED BY RECENT EVIDENCE THAT THE GAULLIST PARTY HAS BEEN SLIPPING AWAY FROM HIS CONTROL, E.G., HIS INABILITY TO ACHIEVE THE PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM SHORTENING THE PRESIDENTIAL TERM AND THE PROPOSED REFORM OF THE ABORTION LAW; AND THE COOL RECEPTION GIVEN TO HIS NAME AND POLICIES AT THE UDR PARTY CONFERENCE LAST NOVEMBER. OBVIOUSLY, IF POMPIDOU IS FORCED TO RESIGN, HE WILL DO EVERYTHING IN HIS POWER TO IMPOSE HIS CHOICE OF A SUCCESSOR ON THE MAJORITY PARTIES. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER POMPIDOU WILL BE ABLE TO CONTROL THE PARTY MECHANISM IF HE CHOOSES A SUCCESSOR SUCH AS MESSMER WHO MAY BE CONSI-

DERED BY OTHER UDR FIGURES AS UNLIKELY TO BEAT MITTERRAND.
ALTHOUGH TOO SOON TO PREDICT, THE NEXT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS
COULD RESULT IN VICTORY BY A NON-GAULLIST CANDIDATE,
AND COULD PRODUCE THE FIRST CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS OF
THE FIFTH REPUBLIC.
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